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Avalanche Notes

INT. FOREST & RANGE
EXPERIMENT STATION

JAN 13 1985

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U.S. Forest Service
Westwide Avalanche Network

NOVEMBER 1985

Early and lasting snows came to the mountains of the West in September. This snow cover lay on the ground during an October Indian Summer and was ripe for IG growth on slopes facing away from the sun. The snow cover had disappeared, however, from most Westwide study sites by the coming of November. Winter in the West began in spectacular fashion on November 9 when a major storm born in the Pacific first battered the Cascades and Sierra and then swept into the Rockies. Two to five feet of snow fell during the course of the storm. On the 9th in Colorado, Berthoud Pass with 23 inches and Winter Park with 14 inches both set new November records for snowfall in 24 hours. And Sunlight recorded 46 inches from the 8th-10th.

After this initial storm there was little relief from cold, snow, and wind the rest of the month. Most mountain data sites recorded much-above-average snowfalls for November. Amounts of snowfall (and percent of the November normal) for selected sites were: Alpine Meadows, CA, 103.5" (about 300%); Mt. Rainier, WA, 119" (122%); Snowbird, UT, 117.5" (225%); and in Colorado, Berthoud Pass, 72" (158%); Winter Park, 55.5" (163%); Monarch, 53.3" (170%); Copper Mtn., 61.5" (180%); and Gothic, 116.4" (270%). Alaska had a dry November, as shown by only 21.5" of snowfall at Alyeska.

Six people died in avalanches, making this the deadliest November on record. The first fatal slide struck on the 13th near Alta, UT. Two ski tourers were totally buried when they triggered a sizeable slab. Both were located by their beacons and uncovered within 30 minutes but that was not soon enough: both men died. On the 17th, the second killing event struck the Bessie G mine in the LaPlata Mountains north of Durango, CO. Ironically two miners were constructing a makeshift snowshed at the mine entrance when an avalanche buried them in the tunnel. One man was encased in snow and died. The second started the arduous task of digging out, his hardhat being his only tool. Twenty-two hours later he broke through to daylight. He spent the night in a snow cave and almost succumbed to the cold before being rescued the next day. Frostbite was his only injury. On the 22nd east of Breckenridge, CO, two men on skis were climbing a slope with a shallow snow cover when it fractured far above them. The avalanche swept them into a gully and buried them deeply. The following day rescuers recovered the bodies of both men plus the body of one man's dog. The final fatal accident happened at Sugar Bowl, CA on the 29th, and it was a post-control avalanche. A slope called Steilhung was hit with two bombs and six ski cuts: no avalanche released. The slope was opened, and the first two skiers down it triggered a slide. One survived, but the other, who was buried 7 feet deep for 80 minutes, did not.

Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station

PROBABILITY

A serious but nonfatal accident took place on the 23rd on Teton Pass, WY when a slide struck a moving car and knocked it off the highway. The car was totalled, and one passenger was injured. Another close call happened on the 12th when a plow driver clearing snow along Colorado Highway 110 near Silverton found himself and his machinery totally buried by an avalanche. He was rescued unhurt. Through November, avalanches had caught 16 people, buried 10, injured 2, and killed 6.

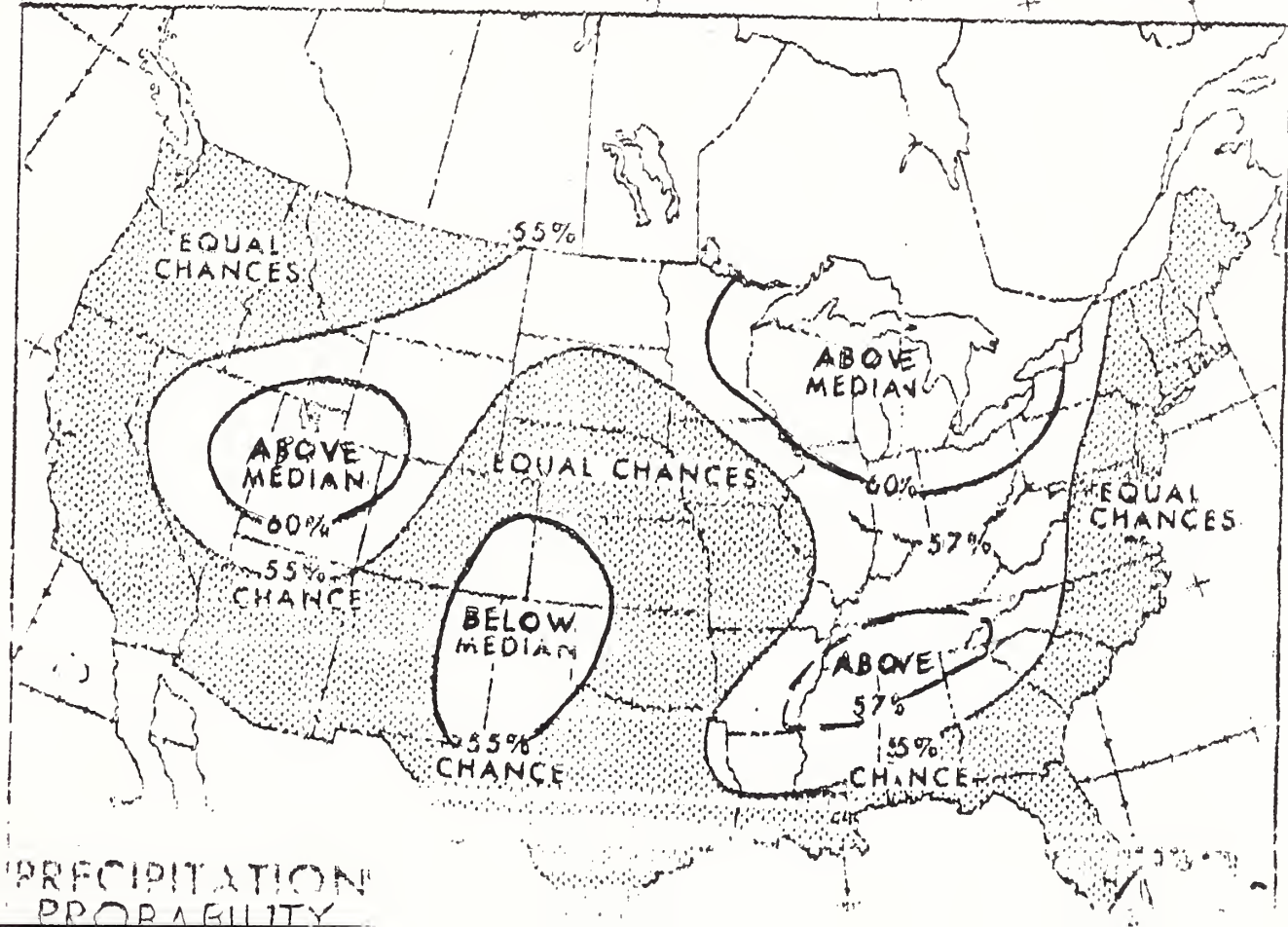
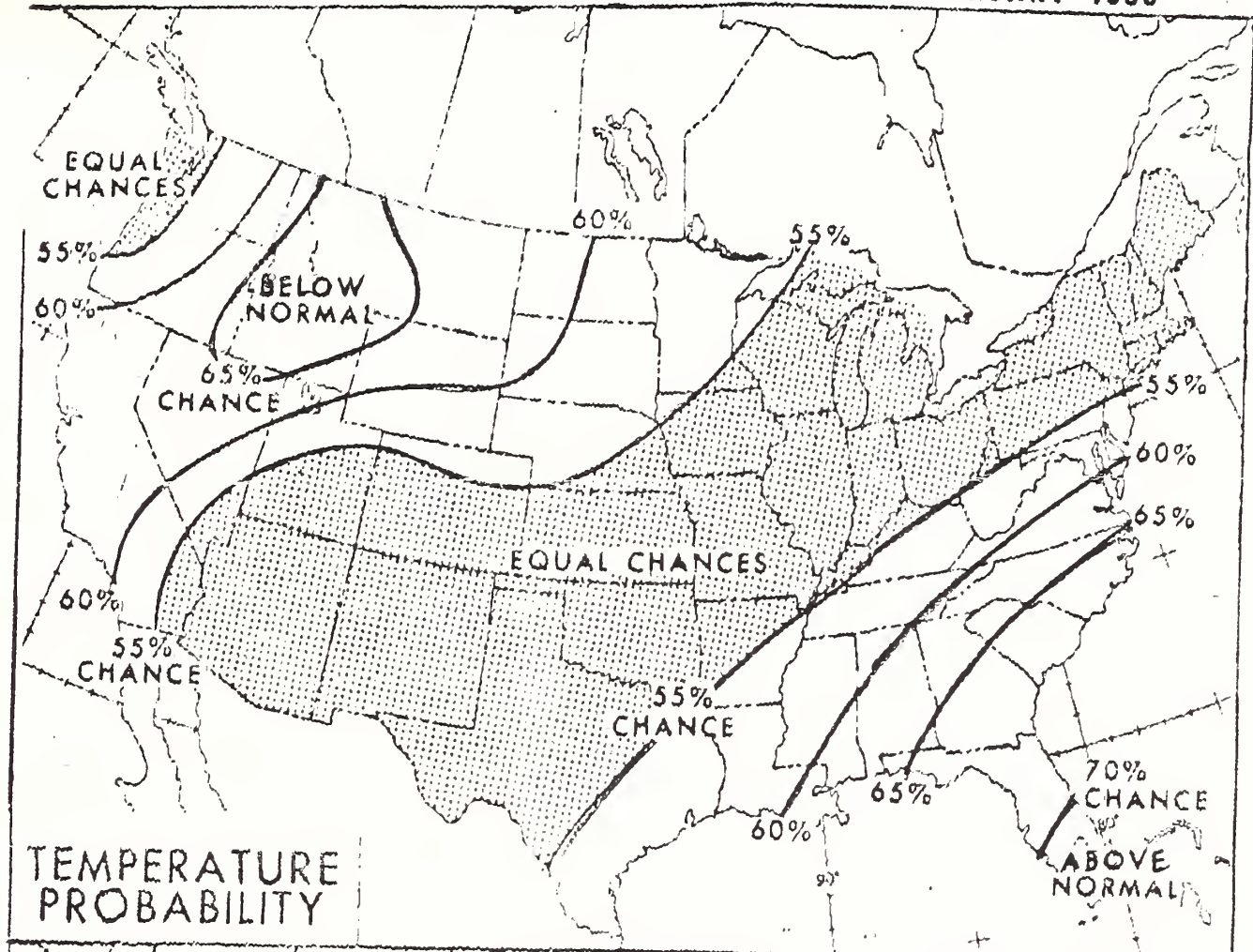
This year we offer you three long-range outlooks on this winter's weather -- the National Weather Service, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and the Wizard of Id.

(Note: Data processing is running behind, so no tabulated weather and avalanche data is included with the November Notes. We will include November's data as an insert to the December Notes.)

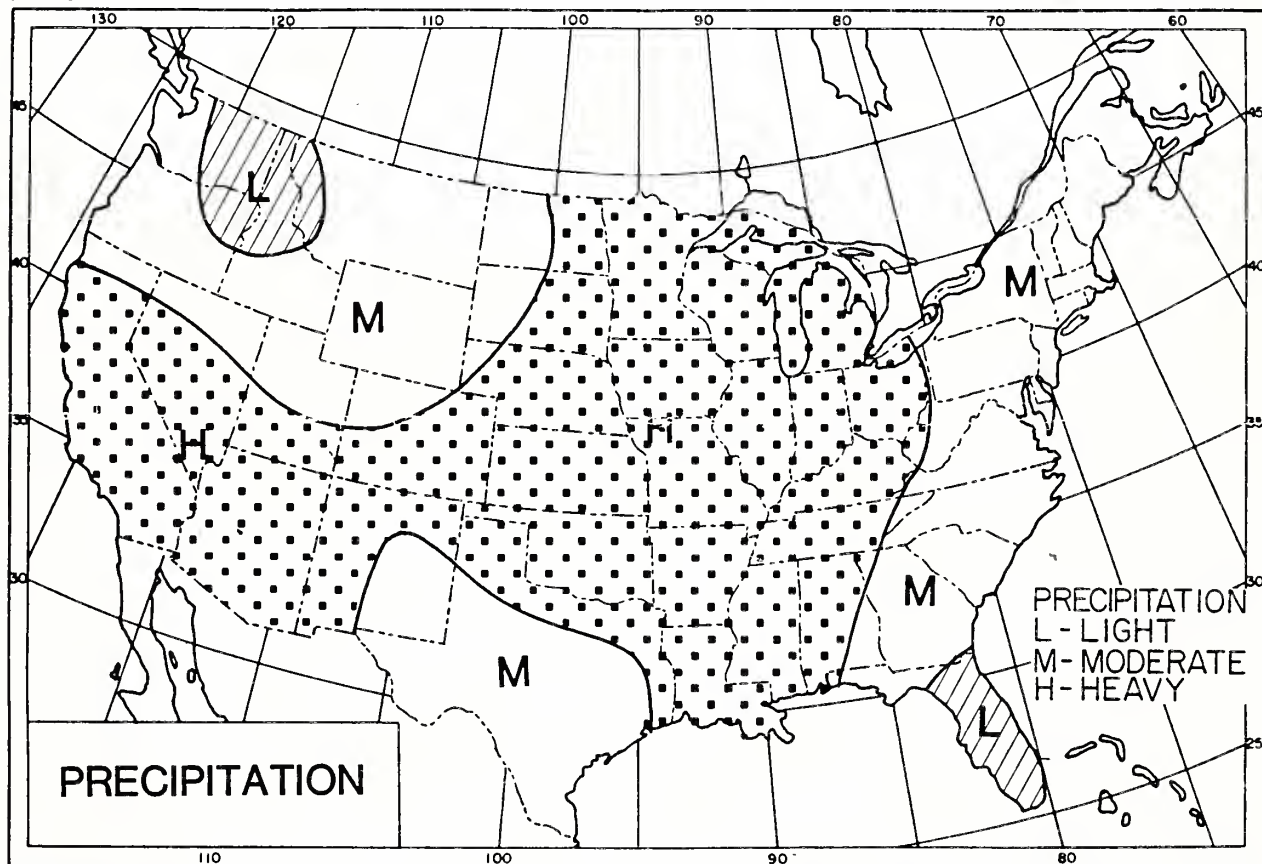
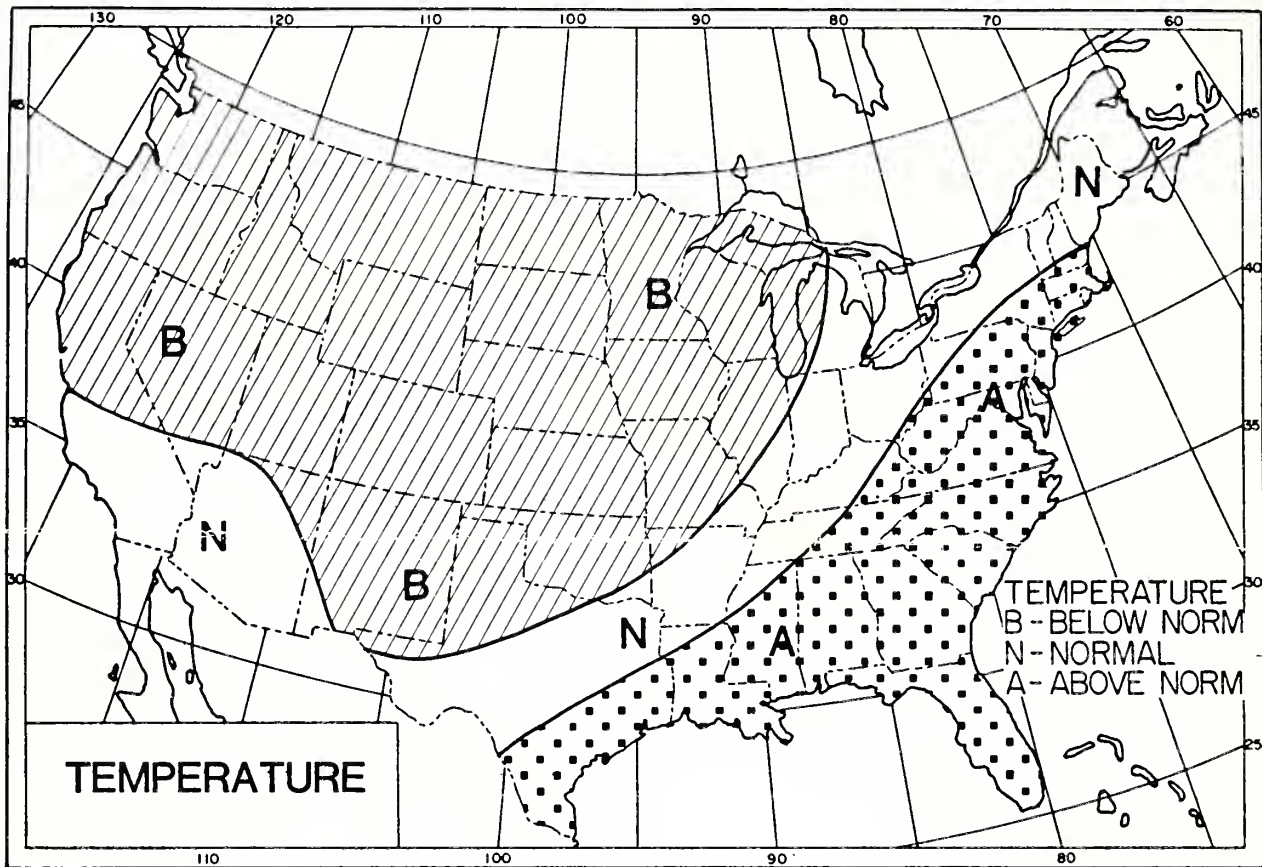
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90-DAY OUTLOOK FOR DECEMBER 1985 THROUGH FEBRUARY 1986



PREDICTED FOR WINTER 1985-86 (DEC. '85, JAN., FEB. '86)



Completed Nov. 26, 1985 from data ending Nov. 22, 1985 J. Namias & D. Cayan

EXPERIMENTAL FORECAST. This forecast is made as a test of experimental procedures based on limited physical understanding and thus may have only marginal usefulness